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ABSTRACT

This survey of the Algonkian way of life in Eastern New York state, adjacent portions of New Jersey and Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts is derived from historical, ethnographical and archeological sources. The physical setting of this area is described briefly. Algonkian life is presented in three major stages of development: 1) the prehistoric period of nomadic life as traced through archaic artifacts such as tools, weapons and ornaments; 2) a period of cultural transition occurring about 2500 B.C. and referred to as the early Woodland period; and 3) the post-colonial period, around the 16th century, in which these Indians began living in larger settlements and established a cohesiveness of tribes that prevented Europeans from seizing the land by force. Indian population later decreased in this area when outward pressures, diseases, and conflicts caused the Algonkians to move farther inland. Descriptions are given of physical appearance and dress, housing, settlement sites, food, social and political structures, Indian practices of warfare, wampum, and ritual. (Related documents are ED 032 985, ED 032 986, and ED 048 950.) (SJM)

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INDIAN HISTORY OF NEW YORK STATE
PART III - THE ALGONKIAN TRIBES

By WILLIAM A. RITCHIE — State Archeologist

Educational Leaflet No. 8

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THE ALGONKIAN TRIBES

Introduction

In the following brief account of the manner of life of the eastern Algonkian Indian tribes, the organization and treatment of the data, which are drawn from historical, ethnographical and archeological sources, rather closely parallel the description of the Iroquois and their culture given in Leaflet No. 7 of this series. This will facilitate comparison of the various aspects of custom, belief and activity (cultural traits) of the two linguistically different Indian groups.

The tribes included in this survey belonged to the eastern division of the great Algonkian or Algonquian* stock, once the most widely distributed linguistic family in North America (fig. 1).

The general area of our survey covers eastern New York State, adjacent portions of New Jersey and Pennsylvania, and the southern New England States -- Connecticut, Rhode Island and Massachusetts.

Emphasis will be given, however, to the groups inhabiting the Hudson Valley, Long Island and Staten Island, namely, the Mahican, Wappinger, Lenni Lenape or Delaware, and Montauk confederacies (fig. 2). The cultural similarities throughout the whole area, at least in early historic times, to which the major portion of our account pertains, seem to have been so close that the descriptions given have a general validity. The source and specific application of the quoted references are, however, given in each case.

The Physical Setting

Both biologically and culturally, man is dependent for his needs upon his environmental surroundings. This is not to assert that environment by itself creates the cultural pattern of any social group, but rather that it serves to mold and delimit the activities of the social group, whose culture or way of life is fundamentally conditioned by historical factors of tradition. In a primitive society, where trade interchanges and technologies are rudimentary, these effects operate with greater force than in a complex civilization having broadly ramifying commercial connections and advanced technologies.

Included in the physical milieu are such factors as geology, physiography, soils, minerals, water, climate, flora and fauna. Obviously, in this short article only a cursory inspection can be made of certain aspects of these factors.

The eastern New York area rests upon some of the oldest, as well as some of the younger surface rock formations in North America. Thus the Adirondack Mountains and the southern New England Uplands consist largely of Precambrian

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*Not to be confused with the Algonkin, a small group of the same linguistic stock, formerly resident along the Gatineau River, a tributary of the Ottawa River, in western Quebec.

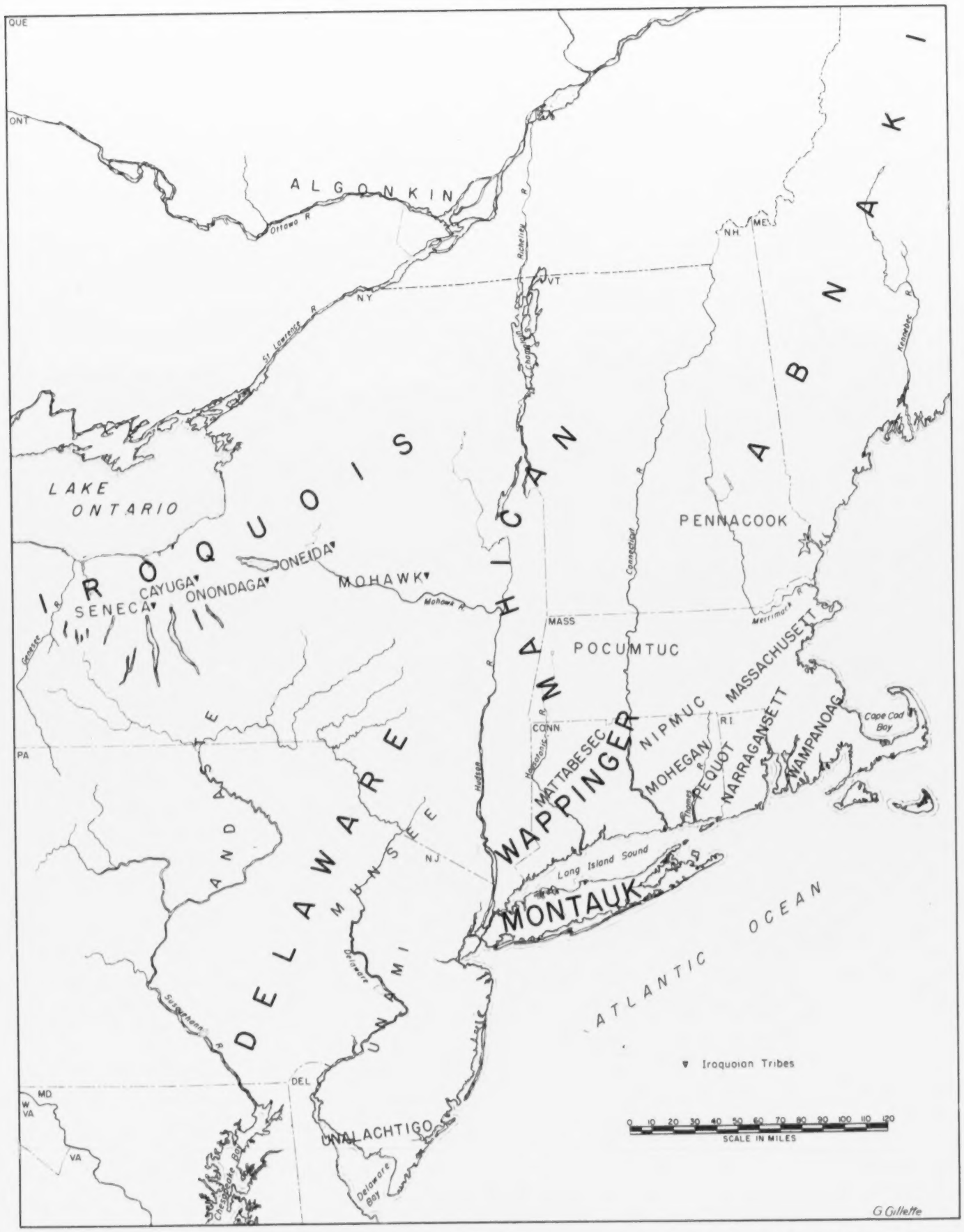

FIG. 1 LOCATION OF MAJOR EASTERN ALGONKIAN GROUPS AND THEIR IROQUOIAN NEIGHBORS ABOUT A.D. 1600

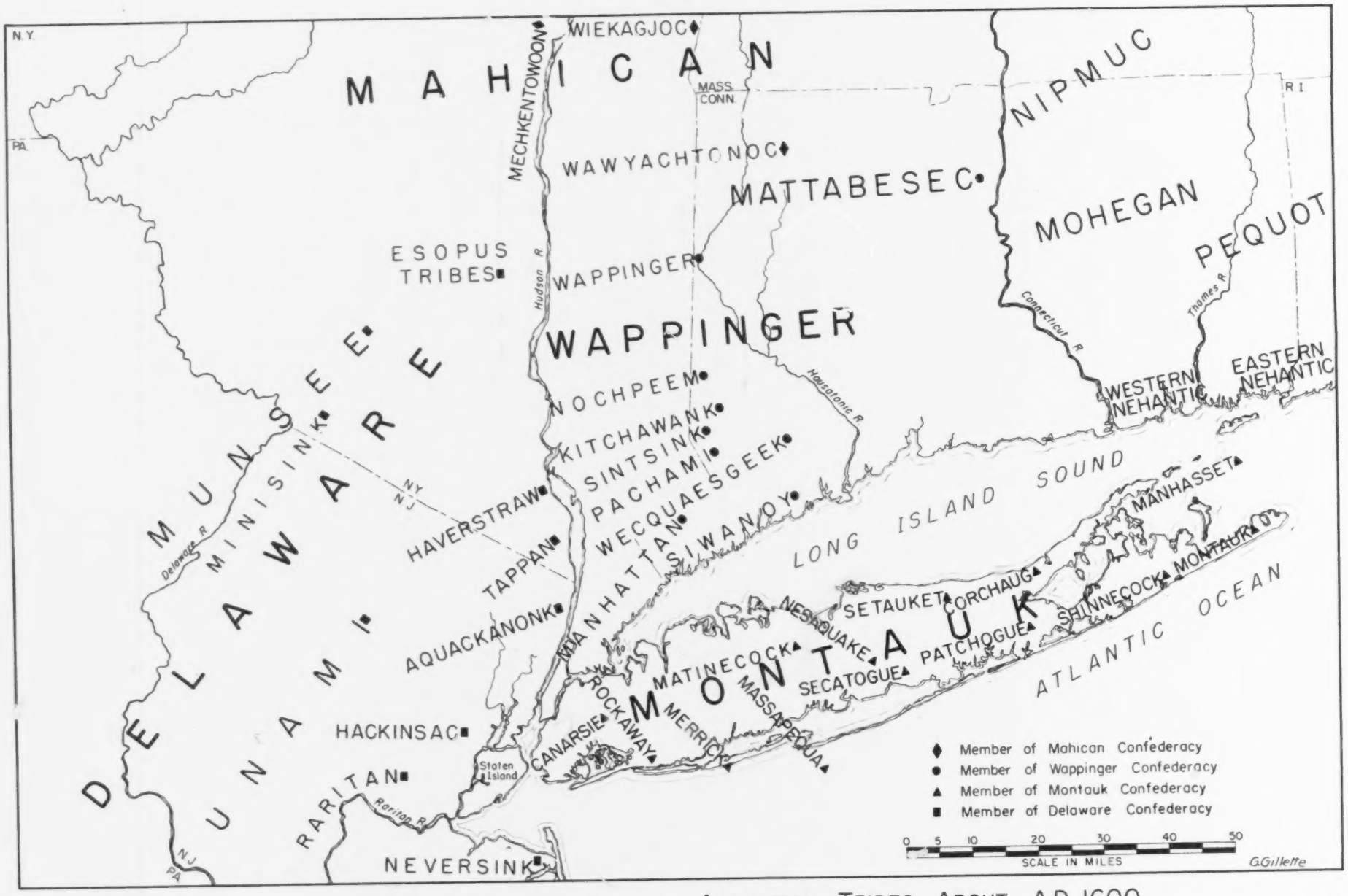

FIG. 2 LOCATION OF SOME COASTAL ALGONKIAN TRIBES ABOUT A.D. 1600

igneous and metamorphic rocks, fire-formed before life had appeared on earth, and yielding slates, basalts and other rocks useful in Indian toolmaking, while the small section on the west side of the Hudson below the Highlands, extending south into New Jersey, is composed of Triassic sedimentary rocks, laid down during the age of dinosaurs. The bulk of the rock formations on both sides of the Hudson Valley, including the Catskills and Taconic range, fall in between, being composed of marine sediments of the Ordovician, Silurian and Devonian periods, some of which produced the flints so essential to the primitive hunter. Over all rests a mantle, thick or thin, of silts, sands, clays and gravels, left by ice and water of the several stages of the Wisconsin or final Ice Age of Pleistocene times. Indeed, Long Island is composed of the terminal moraines and outwash deposits of two such glacial stages.

The physiography of the eastern New York area shows considerable variation. One of its prominent features is a long, narrow, lowland belt extending from the vicinity of Newburgh northward through the Hudson Valley, along the eastern side of Lake Champlain into the St. Lawrence Valley. This region, known as the Hudson-Champlain Lowland, together with Long Island, the Seaboard Lowland of New England and the Connecticult Valley were, in Indian times as in the present, the most densely populated portions of the entire area.

Back 6 to 20 miles from the coastal belt lay the rugged terrain of the New England Uplands, whose western ramparts, the north-south trending, folded rock ridges and narrow intervening valleys of the Taconic and Green Mountains, flanked the eastern border of the Hudson-Champlain Lowland. This rough and inhospitable country was little frequented by Indians and constituted an effective barrier between New York and New England tribes.

West of the Hudson-Champlain Lowland occurred a second major barrier comprising the Adirondacks to the north, and the Catskills and adjacent Allegheny Plateau farther south. Although this barrier was interrupted by two water routes to the interior, namely, the St. Lawrence and Mohawk Rivers, the evidence of archeology and history strongly reveals its isolating effects.

Over this whole mountainous girdle the soils, whether derived from glacial accumulations or the decay of local rocks, are prevailingly sandy, thin and poor. When first known to history, the dominant forest cover comprised red spruce, balsam fir and paper birch, intermixed with hemlock, white pine, sugar maple, beech and yellow birch. Until these forests were invaded by lumbermen, who made large openings in which young trees and bushes subsequently thrived and furnished browse for deer, it is extremely probable that the quantity of these animals, the favorite big game food of the Indians, was very scanty. This is doubtless the key to the explanation of the few and small evidences of Indian occupation in these mountainous regions.

Along the Hudson, part of the eastern shore of Lake Champlain, Long Island, Staten Island and the southern New England lowland regions, occur deeper soils, also for the most part of light texture, such as silts and sandy loams, all readily

tillable with simple digging sticks and stone hoes (fig. 4,e). Here the climax forest at the time of first white exploration consisted mainly of mixed hardwoods -- chestnut, oaks and hickories, with certain southern species, such as sweet gum, willow oak and persimmon, growing in the coastal section. Grasses and leafy shrubs were abundant in open areas and were probably kept in check by the Indians through the use of fire.

Because of these natural food resources, the deer and wild turkey attained abundance, along with a host of lesser animals. Since the primary factor in the distribution of life is the availability of its food supply, it is small wonder that human population clustered here, particularly in view of the close proximity to rivers and coasts with their wealth of fish, shellfish and waterfowl. The earlier hunters, fishers and gatherers of wild vegetal foods subsisted wholly on the yield of woods, marshes and waters, selecting for living sites the well-drained, warm, sandy soils of knolls and stream terraces, especially where smaller tributaries of colder potable water came down from the hills. Their agricultural successors, who added maize, beans and squashes to their fare, likewise preferred these spots, but in addition cultivated the fertile flood plains. Here, too, replacing the Indian farmers, the white colonists first established themselves.

During the long span of human occupation of the eastern New York area, now known to have encompassed more than 5,000 years, climatic conditions, although not stable, were doubtless propitious for the life of man. Our knowledge of postglacial climatic succession here is mainly by interpolation from the wider field of eastern North American bog studies of fossil pollen. It seems likely that a cool, moist stage, fostering the dominance of hemlock forests during the assumed paleo-Indian hunter stage, had already gradually given way, some 3500 B.C., to a warmer and drier climate than the present, with an oak-hickory forest maximum. At about this time, according to radiocarbon dating of Indian sites in central New York, Early Archaic period hunters had already established themselves (see Educational Leaflet No. 6, p. 3). Approximately 500 years later, by the same method of dating, an aggressive new hunting people, whose culture we have included in the Laurentian phase of the Late Archaic period, had begun to absorb their predecessors (see Educational Leaflet No. 6, fig. 1 and pp. 4-6) Eventually bands with regional variations of the Laurentian culture became the most widespread and numerous of the Archaic period occupants of the Northeast.

A cool and moist climatic phase is believed to have prevailed over the Northeast for most of the period since the birth of Christ, and it seems probable that the direct ancestors of some of our Algonkian tribes were by this time resident within the area.

The Prehistoric Background

Rare surface finds throughout the area of fluted projectile points, and recent reports of three probable habitation sites in Pennsylvania, Vermont and Massachusetts yielding such points in addition to characteristic early forms of

scrapers, knives and graving tools, comprise the rather scanty evidence of a paleo-Indian period. Although here unassociated with any animal remains, the similarity of the eastern fluted points to those of Clovis (not Folsom) type in the Southwest, which have repeatedly been found with bones of mammoth and mastodon, suggests a fair order of antiquity.

Excavations during the past few years at various places in the Eastern Algonkian area have added to our meager knowledge here of the cultures of the Archaic period. Where sufficiently early stratification is found, a narrow-bladed, stemmed or weakly side-notched projectile point, diagnostic of the Lamoka culture in central and western New York, is also present here in the oldest definite cultural horizon (see fig. 3,a and Educational Leaflet No. 6, pp. 3-4). Not enough evidence has yet been uncovered, however, to define an eastern manifestation of the Lamoka culture. On the other hand, stone tool complexes, having well-defined connections with the Laurentian site series elsewhere in New York, are well known in the eastern area, where they seem to have provided the cultural foundations for various regional sequences (see fig. 3, d, e, h; fig. 4, d, f, and Educational Leaflet No. 6, pp. 4-6).

Among recognized, but still largely undescribed Late Archaic period cultures, there is one marked by the use of cooking pots of steatite (soapstone) and narrow-bladed points with "fish-tail" bases, probably for tipping javelins, since it is doubtful whether the bow and arrow were yet known in this part of the world (figs. 3, b; 4, c). These artifacts apparently pertain to a prepottery period of varying length in sundry parts of the eastern United States, during which people with local variations in some other elements of their culture were replacing perishable cooking receptacles of wood or bark with durable stone vessels.

Fig. 3 Prehistoric Tools, Weapons and Ornaments Found in the Eastern Algonkian Area

a. Early Archaic type point
b. "Fish-tail" type points, Early Woodland period
c. Triangular points, Late Woodland period
d. Perforated bannerstone, Archaic period
e. Notched bannerstone, Archaic period
f. Decorated stone pipe, Middle Woodland period
g. Necklace of native copper and shell beads, with stone pendant, Middle Woodland period
h. Stone gouge, Archaic period
i. Large composite bone fishhook
j. Small bone fishhook
k. Antler harpoon head

(i, j, k after Willoughby, 1935, fig. 121. By courtesy of Peabody Museum, Harvard University. Other specimens in N. Y. State Museum.)

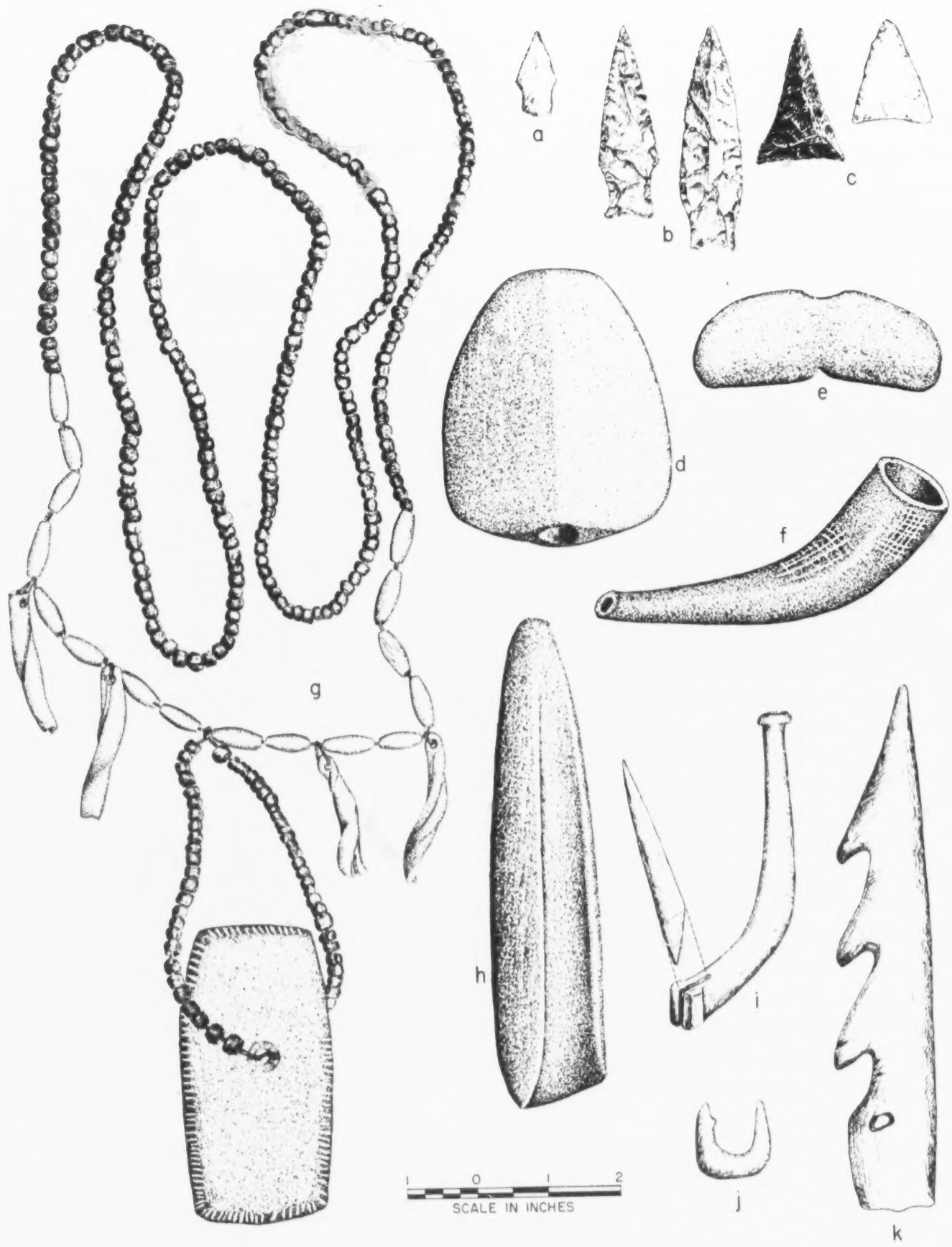

FIG. 3 PREHISTORIC TOOLS, WEAPONS AND ORNAMENTS FOUND IN THE EASTERN ALGONKIAN AREA

The transition from stone pots to pottery jars is clearly shown in the Orient culture of eastern Long Island, where among the exceedingly rare forms of the latter occurs a clay copy of a common stone style. This culture supplies one of the few known fragmentary archeological records of the important changes which were taking place in the Northeast, beginning about 2500 B.C. in northern New York, on Carbon 14 dating, through which the Early Woodland period was ushered in. This term is used by the archeologist to designate the introduction of pottery and other cultural traits, often including, as in the northeastern area, a variety of stone, shell and copper ornaments, the first tubular smoking pipes, and a complex burial ceremonialism, utilizing extensive grave offerings, including ritualistic objects and symbolic red ocher (see fig. 3,g and Educational Leaflet No. 6, pp. 6-8).

Possibly related to Orient, is North Beach, a little-known culture of the coastal area in which several pottery styles were introduced or locally developed. The Clearview stage, in which occurs the first evidence of smoking pipes in the same area (fig. 3,f), seems to have emerged from a North Beach ancestry. Although direct proof is wanting, there are suggestions of the beginnings of a food-producing economy, presumably through diffusion of knowledge from earlier centers lying to the south and southwest of Long Island.

The probable infiltration into the lower Hudson Valley, Manhattan Island, Staten Island and western Long Island of new Indian groups equipped, among other things, with more ornate pot styles and finely chipped triangular projectile points, almost certainly for tipping arrows (fig. 3,c), designates for the student of prehistory the start of the Bowmans Brook culture of Late Woodland times. It has been postulated that these events marked the arrival of the direct ancestors of some of the Delaware, Wappinger and western Montauk tribes, who displaced a part of the older resident population, pushing them eastward to mingle with their kinsmen of southern Connecticut and eastern Long Island, whose culture has been termed the Sebonac (fig. 4,b). It should be noted that the Sebonac culture, and the various tribes who employed it, were presumably descended from prior local antecedents, such as Clearview, North Beach and various Archaic period lineages, stemming in large part from the Laurentian. In short, over several millenia, the composition of the population and the culture or way of life in the coastal area had been undergoing changes, both local and general. Cultural changes were probably due not only to modifications arising locally, but to the adoption of new ideas spread from surrounding regions. The arrival of fresh increments of people brought cultural innovations as well as genetic alterations through intermarriage.

Thus, prior to the arrival of Europeans and the beginning of recorded history the Indian inhabitants of the area of our present interest, like those farther inland, which have been more intensively studied (see fig. 1 and Educational Leaflets Nos. 6 and 7), had undergone transition from small nomadic or seminomadic bands of food-gatherers to larger, more or less sedentary village bands of pottery-making agriculturists (see cover illustration).

From Prehistory to History

While the shores of our area may have been scanned by the Cabots in 1498 and the Cortereals may have met the Indians of Rhode Island in 1501-2, the earliest historic description of these natives is attributed to Giovanni da Verrazano in 1524. We shall later quote from his observations of a visit to Narragansett Bay. This explorer may have glimpsed the mouth of the Hudson River, since apparently he entered New York harbor "Upon which they [the Indians]were rowing 30 or more of their small boats, from one shore to the other, filled with multitudes who came to see us."

In September 1609, Henry Hudson, in quest of a short route to the riches of the Orient, ascended the "great river" to the head of tidewater near Albany. In his leisurely voyage up and down he was visited by, and in turn went ashore to observe, a number of friendly Indian groups. From brief accounts of the appearance and customs of these people, preserved in the log-book of Robert Juet, a member of the crew of the Half Moon, and in the Dutch historian, Johan de Laet's extracts from Hudson's lost journal, we have in part reconstructed the picture of Indian life in the Hudson Valley at the dawn of the historic age. In addition, the chief literary sources for the period before 1650 are Wassenaer and Van der Donck, able Dutch historians. Unfortunately, only the latter wrote from direct experience with the country and its people.

Supplementing the recorded observations are, of course, the data drawn from archeological investigations. The discovery of articles of iron, brass, glass and other alien manufactures in certain sites of the coastal series signalizes unmistakably the dawn of Indian and white contact in the forepart of the 17th century. There is ample testimony of the eager adoption of foreign goods and of their rapid replacement of native tools, weapons, ornaments and utensils. This quick acculturation has tended to obscure for the prehistorian an insight into the early period of transition. Taken in connection with the wholesale destruction of Indian sites by white settlements, it has rather effectively prevented the identification of specific groups or tribal entities with archeological cultures. Consequently, it is very difficult to trace the cultural developmental sequence backward in time through a site series from the historically known Algonkian tribes to their prehistoric ancestors.

Apparently, the white man's arrival in the vicinity of New York City coincided with a later stage of the Clasons Point culture (fig. 4,a), which seems to have been derived from the aforementioned Bowmans Brook culture, and both have tentatively been attributed to various groups of the Delaware, Wappinger and western Montauk people. Around the middle of the 17th century, in the fuller light of history, better identifications have been possible; thus, several fortified enclosure sites at opposite ends of Long Island and in southeastern Connecticut have been attributed to the Mohegan-Pequot, Corchaug, Montauk proper and Massapequa (see fig. 2).

As nearly as can be judged from the fragmentary and confusing early records, the Algonkian-speaking groups of our area were loosely organized into

confederacies, each under the leadership of one strong band or tribe. The constituent bands, in turn, consisted of small local communities or villages, each comprising one or more lineages or groups of families related by blood or marriage. Dialectic differences prevailed among the bands, or tribes, even within the narrow confines of the Hudson Valley, where, according to Wassenaer, "It is worthy to remark that so great a diversity of language exists among the numerous tribes. They vary frequently not over 5 or 6 miles, [the Dutch mile was equivalent to 3 and a fraction English miles]; forthwith comes another language; they meet and can hardly understand one another."

The approximate geographical distribution of the major confederacies, at about the beginning of the 17th century, are shown in figure 1, while figure 2 represents an attempt to locate, for the New York area, the ranges or territorial holdings of the principal tribal or band subdivisions of these confederacies. It is quite possible that certain of these units were in reality only subtribes or lineages, deriving their names from the group leader or even from a village. Unfortunately, the state of our knowledge does not permit listing more than a few of the subdivisions of the Mahican* confederacy of the upper Hudson region.

We are told by de Laet that, "The barbarians being divided into many nations and people, differ much from one another in language though very little in manners." This statement seems to be supported by surviving archeological evidence for the similarity of the material culture, at least at the early historic level. It lends a certain measure of certitude to the following reconstruction of the manner of life of the eastern Algonkian people.

Physical Appearance and Dress

Our historical sources agree in describing the natives as "generally well-limbed, slender around the waist, and broad-shouldered," strong in physical constitution and rarely deformed. They shared, with American Indians generally, straight black hair, dark eyes and swarthy skins, "resembling in color the Gypsies of Central Europe."

The earliest account, by Verrazano (1524), is also the best for it depicts the Indian still in his native condition. He says, "Among them[the Indians who came aboard his ship in Narragansett Bay]were two kings more beautiful in form and stature than can possibly be described; one was about 40 years old, the other about 24, and they were dressed in the following manner: The oldest had a deer's skin around his body, artificially wrought in damask figures [elaborately painted], his head was without covering, his hair was tied back in various knots; around his neck he wore a large chain[necklace]ornamented with many stones of different colors. They exceed us in size, and they are of a very fair complexion; some of

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*The Mahican are often confused with the Mohegan who were closely related dialectically and historically to the Pequot, their neighbors in southeastern Connecticut. Originally, the Mohegan probably detached themselves from the Mahican group.

them incline more to a white, and others to a tawny colour; their faces are sharp, their hair long and black, upon the adorning of which they bestow great pains; their eyes are black and sharp, their expression mild and pleasant,.. Their women are of the same form and beauty, very graceful, of fine countenances and pleasing appearance in manners and modesty; they wear no clothing except a deer skin, ornamented like those of the men; some wear very rich lynx skins upon their arms, and various ornaments upon their heads, composed of braids of hair, which also hang down upon their breasts on either side... The older and the married people, both men and women, wear many ornaments in their ears, hanging down in the oriental manner."

At Hudson's first contact with the natives near the Narrows, "many of the people came aboard, some in mantles of feathers, and some in skins of divers sorts of good furs. Some women also came to us with hemp [woven bast, Indian hemp or nettle fiber]. They had red copper tobacco pipes, and other things of copper they did wear about their necks."

This and other early references to the use of copper serve to strengthen the belief in prior sporadic European trade contacts along the coast, providing sheet copper and brass, since very little archeological evidence of the possession of native copper objects has come to light in this area (see fig. 3,g for prehistoric example).

Daniel Denton in 1670 observed that the Indians of the New York City region "wear no Hats, but commonly wear about their Heads a Snake's skin, or a Belt of their money [wampum], or a kind of Ruff made with Deer's hair, and died a scarlet colour, which they esteem very rich.

"They grease their bodies and hair very often, and paint their faces with several colours as black, white, red, yellow, blew, etc. which they take great pride in, every one being painted in a several manner."

Houses and Settlements

Most of the Indian settlements in the area under description were situated near the shore or coast, especially in the immediate vicinity of stream mouths, bays or tidal inlets. Springs are generally to be found nearby. Usually a somewhat elevated piece of ground was chosen, on sandy or well-drained soil. The principal living quarters seem to have been close to the crop plantings and from here the people might move to shore sites for spring and summer fishing, and to equally temporary inland camps, sometimes rockshelter,, for fall and winter hunting, thus following a seasonal cycle of activities widely paralleled by other primitive bands (see cover illustration for shore settlement).

Many of the later town sites were enclosed by rectangular log-stockaded walls, and it is probable that the practice of utilizing enclosures of various shapes began here with the invasion or infiltration of new groups, around the beginning of the Late Woodland period. At about this time also, the people of the Owasco culture

in inland New York were turning to the same protective devices, in common, it seems, with numerous contemporaneous groups in the eastern United States (see Educational Leaflet No. 6, pp. 9-11.)

The territorial limits of each tribal group were recognized by natural boundary features, within which the sources of livelihood -- tillable land, fishing and hunting places, plant gathering locales etc. -- were doubtless shared in common, as among the Iroquois. Such a group might have within its domain one or more villages, each under the jurisdiction of a chief.

The dwelling units might be large or small, even in the same community, depending upon whether they were designed to house many families related by blood, marriage or adoption, or a single, biological family. In general, two house types prevailed within the area, namely, a wigwam and a longhouse. The former and more common was a domed round house, 10 to 30 or more feet in diameter, constructed of an intersecting series of pole arches set in the ground and tied together with bark rope. The covering or thatch of overlapping bark slabs, grass or rush matting, left exposed a smoke hole, whose edges were clay-daubed for fire protection, and a small roundish doorway on one side, closable by a skin or bark cover. A low pole bench, mat and skin covered, in some cases encircled the interior wall and served the occupants as chair and bed. A shallow, bowl-shaped, central floor depression held the fire which cooked for, heated and lighted the wigwam (see cover illustration).

Happily we have several eye witness descriptions of these dwellings by the first explorers and colonists. Verrazano, on his visit to the Wampanoags or Narragansetts of Rhode Island, in 1524, says "We saw their dwellings, which are of a circular form, of about 10 or 12 paces in circumference, made of logs split in halves, without any regularity of architecture, and covered with roofs of straw, nicely put on, which protect them from wind and rain.

"They change their habitations from place to place as circumstances of situation and season may require; this is easily done as they have only to take with them their mats and they have other houses prepared at once. The father and the whole family dwell together in one house in great numbers; in some we saw 25 or 30 persons."

Nearly a century later (1620) the Pilgrims discovered on Cape Cod a hamlet of the small Nauset tribe of the Wampanoag confederacy, composed of similar dwellings of which they have left us the following description, the most detailed account of its kind on record:

These houses "were made with long young sapling trees bended and both ends stuck into the ground. They were made round like unto an arbor, and covered down to the ground with thick and well-wrought mats; and the door was not over a yard high, made of a mat to open. The chimney was a wide open hole in the top, for which they had a mat to cover it close when they pleased. One might stand and go upright in them. In the midst of them were four little trunches knocked into

the ground, and small sticks laid over, on which they hung their pots and what they had to seethe. Round about the fire they lay on mats which are their beds. The houses were double matted, for as they were matted without so were they within with newer and fairer mats. In the houses we found wooden bowls, trays, dishes, earthen pots, hand-baskets made of crab-shells wrought together; also an English pail or bucket; it wanted a bail, but it had two iron ears; there was also baskets of sundry sorts, bigger and some lesser, finer and some coarser; some were curiously wrought with black and white in pretty works and sundry other of their household stuff. We found also two or three deer's heads one whereof had been newly killed, for it was still fresh. There was also a company of deer's feet stuck up in the houses, hart's horns and eagles claws and sundry such like things there was; also two or three baskets full of parched acorns, pieces of fish, and a piece of a broiled herring. We found also a little silk grass, and a little tobacco seed, with some other seeds which we knew not, without was sundry bundles of flags, and sedge, bulrushes and other stuff to make mats."

The dome-shaped wigwam seems to have been the usual type of dwelling on eastern Long Island and in the Hudson Valley. Some of Hudson's men, on going ashore at a small Indian community, probably located between the present Castleton and Hudson, visited "a house well constructed of oak bark, and circular in shape, so that it had the appearance of being built with an arched roof. It contained a great quantity of maize or Indian corn and beans of last year's growth, and there lay near the house for the purpose of drying enough to load three ships, beside what was growing in the fields. On our coming into the house, two mats were spread out to sit upon, and immediately some food was served in well made red wooden bowls; two men were also dispatched at once with bows and arrows in quest of game, who after brought in a pair of pigeons which they had shot."

The longhouse structure, certainly in use on western Long Island, and apparently elsewhere within the area, even in the same villages with the domed wigwams just described, seems to have been similarly constructed of a rectangular framework of arched poles and a bark or mat cover (see cover illustration). It is said to have ranged in length from about 20 to 100 feet and was of course a communal dwelling with a number of fires. It had rather close similarities to the Iroquoian longhouse, described in Educational Leaflet No. 7, pp. 4-6, but may have been somewhat lower. An excellent description of such a house in a Canarsie village on southwestern Long Island was given by two Dutch travelers, Jasper Dankers and Peter Sluyter, in 1679.

"We went from thence to her habitation, where we found the whole troop together, consisting of seven or eight families, and twenty or twenty-two persons, I should think. Their house was low and long, about sixty feet long and fourteen or fifteen feet wide. The bottom was earth, the sides and roof were made of reed and the bark of chestnut trees; the posts, or columns, were limbs of trees stuck in the ground, and all fastened together. The top, or ridge of the roof was open about half a foot wide, from one end to the other, in order to let the smoke escape, in place of a chimney. On the sides, or walls, of the house, the roof was so low that you could hardly stand under it. The entrances, or doors, which were at both

ends, were so small and low that they had to stoop down and squeeze themselves to get through them. The doors were made of reed or flat bark. In the whole building there was no lime, stone, iron or lead. They build their fire in the middle of the floor, according to the number of families which live in it, so that from one end to the other each of them boils its own pot, and eats when it likes, not only the families by themselves, but each Indian alone, according as he is hungry, at all hours, morning, noon and night. By each fire are the cooking utensils, consisting of a pot, a bowl, or calabash, and a spoon also made of a calabash. These are all that relate to cooking. They lie upon mats with their feet towards the fire, on each side of it. They do not sit much upon anything raised up, but, for the most part, sit on the ground or squat on their ankles... All who live in one house are generally of one stock or descent, as father and mother with their offspring."

Food and Food Producing Activities and Equipment

The earlier occupants of the eastern Algonkian area were food gatherers, not food producers, as has been pointed out. Current archeological knowledge of the area is insufficient to determine the precise period and cultural horizon at which agricultural practices were introduced but, as has been surmised, the Clearview stage of the Middle Woodland period may have witnessed the beginnings of the transition into the new economy.

Direct evidence in the form of charred corn and beans occurs in later prehistoric sites, while maize, bean and squash agriculture is amply attested for the early historic period. Tobacco is also said to have been grown.

Women were the food producers, as is usually the case in primitive hoe tillage. They sowed, harvested and finally stored the crops in woven bags of grass, bast or Indian hemp, in grass or bark-lined pits dug near the wigwams. Verrazano (1524) mentions that, "In the time of sowing they are governed by the moon, the sprouting of grain and many ancient usages."

Fig. 4 Prehistoric Tools and Utensils Found in the Eastern Algonkian Area

a. Pottery vessel of Clasons Point culture, Late Woodland period
b. Pottery vessel of Sebonac culture, Late Woodland period
c. Steatite cooking pot of Orient culture, Late Archaic period
d. Method of hafting grooved stone ax
e. Notched stone hoe
f. Grooveless stone ax or celt in original wooden handle
(a, after photograph by Montgomery County Dept. of History and Archives; b, courtesy of Long Island Chapter, N. Y. State Archeological Assn.; f, after Willoughby, 1935, fig. 76, courtesy of Peabody Museum, Harvard University. Other specimens in N. Y. State Museum.)

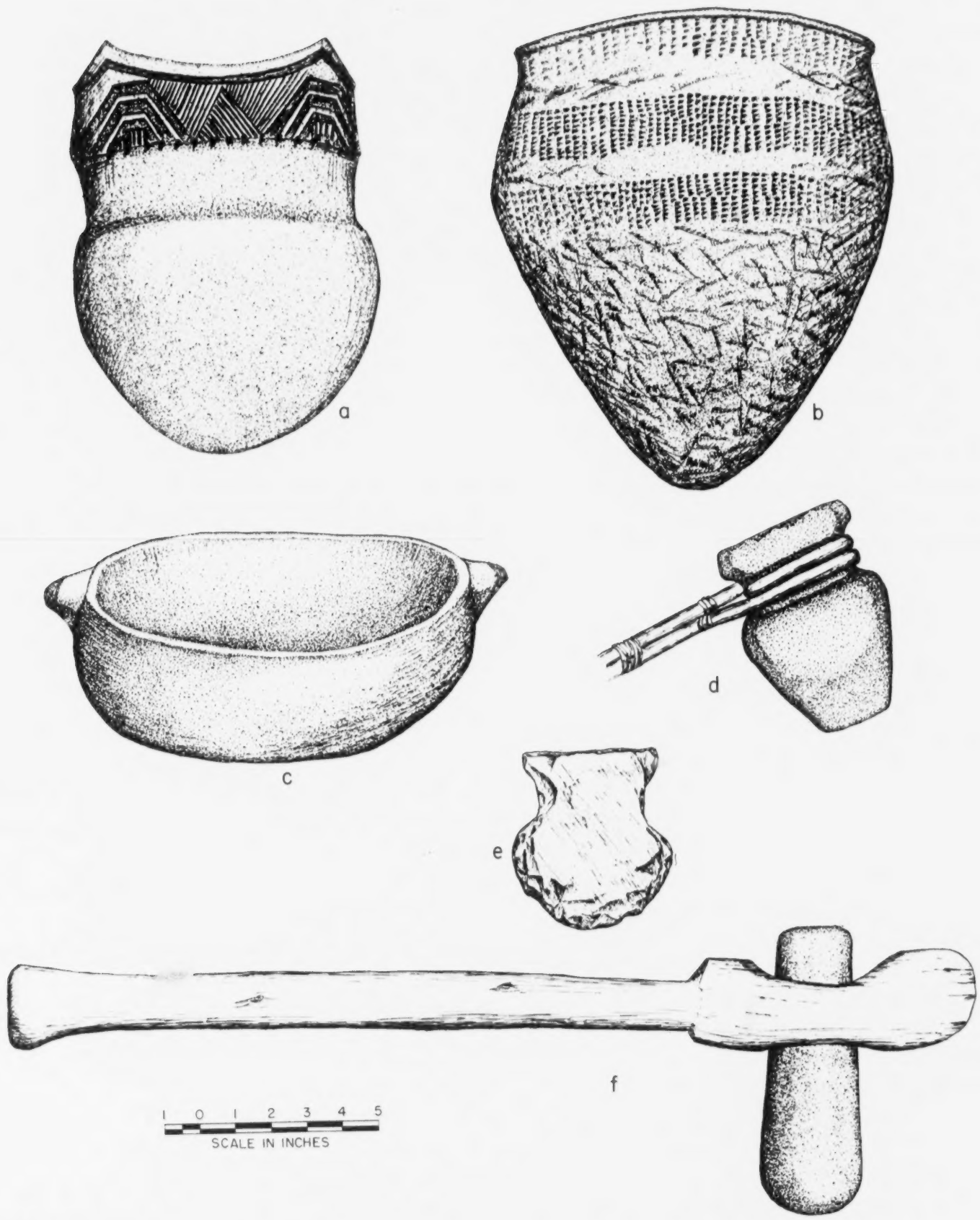

FIG. 4 PREHISTORIC TOOLS AND UTENSILS FOUND IN THE EASTERN ALGONKIAN AREA

With wooden mortar and pestle and stone mealing devices of several kinds, the corn kernels were crushed to a coarse flour. Their "bread," described by the early historians as "poor and gross," was either baked in the ashes or boiled in pottery vessels. Beans of different colors were often mixed with it to form "succotash," a concoction learned by the whites from the Eastern Algonkians, along with such other corn dishes as hominy, samp and johnnycake.

Although largely dependent upon agriculture, these Algonkian groups, like their Iroquoian contemporaries, continued to collect wild plant foods, and to hunt, fish and gather shellfish, many varieties of which they could dry and store when necessary.

Into their stew pots and baking pits went a wide assortment of mammals, birds, fish and even reptiles. While deer, bear, turkey, shellfish and waterfowl were highly favored, dogs, snakes, frogs, eagles, skunks, foxes, and other creatures repulsive to European trained tastes were prepared for consumption, sometimes without bothering to remove the entrails.

There seems to have been no set time for meals; everyone ate when hungry and the pot was usually on the fire. Food hospitality was a highly developed trait. The eater sat on a coarsely woven mat of grass or rushes; his equipment included a wooden bowl and spoon, a stone, later iron, knife, and a gourd of water, the only beverage (see fig. 5,e,g).

To kindle a fire, a common wooden drill rotated between the hands was employed. The probably still older method of striking sparks into shredded bark or grass tinder by means of a flint strike-a-light and a lump of iron pyrites persisted into historic times.

Hunting as well as fighting weapons comprised the bow, with flint or bone-tipped arrows, the spear and club (see figs. 3,c, 5,a). Prior to the introduction of the bow and arrow, at a still undetermined time in the culture sequence, the javelin or short throwing spear was employed, doubtless in connection with a spear-thrower. Notched, grooved or perforated weights for the latter device, called by archeologists "bannerstones," occur in cultures of the preceramic and early ceramic horizons, along with a wide variety of generally heavy projectile points (see fig. 3,a,b,d,e).

Quite surely the hunters of this area were familiar with the use of various types of traps and snares, and a form of the latter, utilizing a bent sapling and cord noose, known as a spring-pole and snare with leg catch, is well described by the Pilgrims on Cape Cod.

Fish nets and weirs aided in the capture of fish, but hook and line angling with simple or compound bone points, as well as spearing with barbed-bone points, either fixed or detachable from the shaft when the animal was struck, are attested by archeological and historical data (see fig. 3,i,j,k).

For fishing, travel and other activities on water, the hollow log dugout boat, propelled by short scooplike paddles, and carrying up to 20 men, was in general use,

probably as early as the Archaic period. The Laurentian cultures produce the stone gouge and adze, tools which we believe were employed, with the aid of fire and stone scrapers, in the shaping and excavation of such boats, as well as bowls and other large wooden utensils (see fig. 3,h and cover illustration). In subsequent cultures down to historic times the adze and axe, both grooved and ungrooved, survive, but the stone gouge went out of fashion about the end of the Archaic period (see fig. 4,d,f).

Social and Political Organization

Unlike their Iroquoian neighbors to the west, the Algonkian tribes of our area probably had no clan organization. The basic social unit was the bilateral or biological family, consisting of parents and children, but generally, it seems, the group inhabiting a single wigwam or longhouse comprised also the married children, their spouses and offspring. Thus would arise a lineage or band of families related by blood or marriage, with an old man at their head, and several such extended families or bands would constitute a village, under the leadership of a chief or sachem whose office seems to have been hereditary in certain families.

Apparently there was also a tribal sachem over a group of chieftaincies and, when a more or less loose confederacy of tribes took place for mutual protection, the sachemship of the most powerful prevailed as the supreme source of authority over the others. The general atmosphere of government seems to have been democratic, however, the principal sachem being advised by a council of lesser tribal and village chiefs.

It would also appear that these civil sachems were supplemented by elected war chiefs when, upon due deliberation in civil council, it was decided to put the war parties into the field.

Van der Donck tells us, "The natives generally marry but one wife and no more, unless it be a chief who is great and powerful; such frequently have two, three or four wives, of the neatest and handsomest of women, and who live together without variance." Wife lending was not frowned upon, provided the woman was agreeable to the temporary exchange.

The marriage ceremony was very simple; presents from the groom or his parents to the bride's mother or parents, sufficed to establish the union. Divorce seems to have been equally simple. Chastity in wedlock was observed, both sexes being subject to punishment for adulterous relations, but unmarried people, young or old, had complete freedom in sexual behavior.

Great affection prevailed for children. In cases of divorce they followed their mother to a new residence.

Warfare

The early relations of the eastern Algonkians with Europeans were almost universally amicable. Verrazano in 1524 was cordially received in Narragansett

Bay; men, women and children came aboard Hudson's ship (1609) at various places between the Narrows and Albany "making show of love" and bringing gifts of corn, pumpkins, beans, oysters and other foods. The white man's fear of treachery and his sense of superiority to the natives, which led to occasional violations of the laws of hospitality, resulted in incidents of violence on Hudson's return trip down the river. This sort of thing had been going on along the New England coast even before this date, and hostilities were greatly intensified as the Europeans increased their pressures for trade and settlement on the Indian population.

Prior to interference from beyond the Atlantic, desultory feuding, in the form of raids and reprisals for trespass and murder, evidently was a chronic condition among the eastern Algonkians, as attested by human skeletons with arrow and other wounds. There are also archeological tokens of scalping, torture, burning and cannibalism, in pre-Columbian days.

Of these Indian methods of warfare we are told by early observers, with their greatly different cultural concepts, that, "As soldiers, they are far from being honorable, but perfidious and accomplish all their designs by treachery; they also use many strategems to deceive their enemies, and execute by night almost all their plans that are in any way hazardous.... When they cannot escape....they make little of death....and despise all tortures that can be inflicted on them ...."

Prisoners taken in war were sometimes spared by adoption, especially women and children. Before leaving for a war raid, men "painted their faces black and red, or some all black, some all red, with some streaks of white under their eyes."

Blood feuds arising from murder did not invariably lead to war. The surrender of the culprit by his family or friends to the kin of the murdered person aborted the quest for revenge; or a suitable payment, usually in wampum, might suffice to console the bereaved family. Captives might also be ransomed by means of this medium of exchange often.

Fig. 5 Articles Used by the Historic Eastern Algonkian Tribes

a. Ball-headed, wooden war club of the Munsee (Delaware)

b, c. Dried deerskin drum and wooden drumsticks employed by the Munsee (Delaware) in their Big House Ceremonies

d. Carved wooden feast paddle of the Mahican

e. Delaware Indian wooden maple sugar paddle

f. Decorated basswood-splint basket of the Mahican

g. Individual eating bowl of wood, made by the Delaware

h. Algonkian Indian wampum belt

(b, c, e, g, h by courtesy of the American Museum of Natural History. Other specimens in N. Y. State Museum

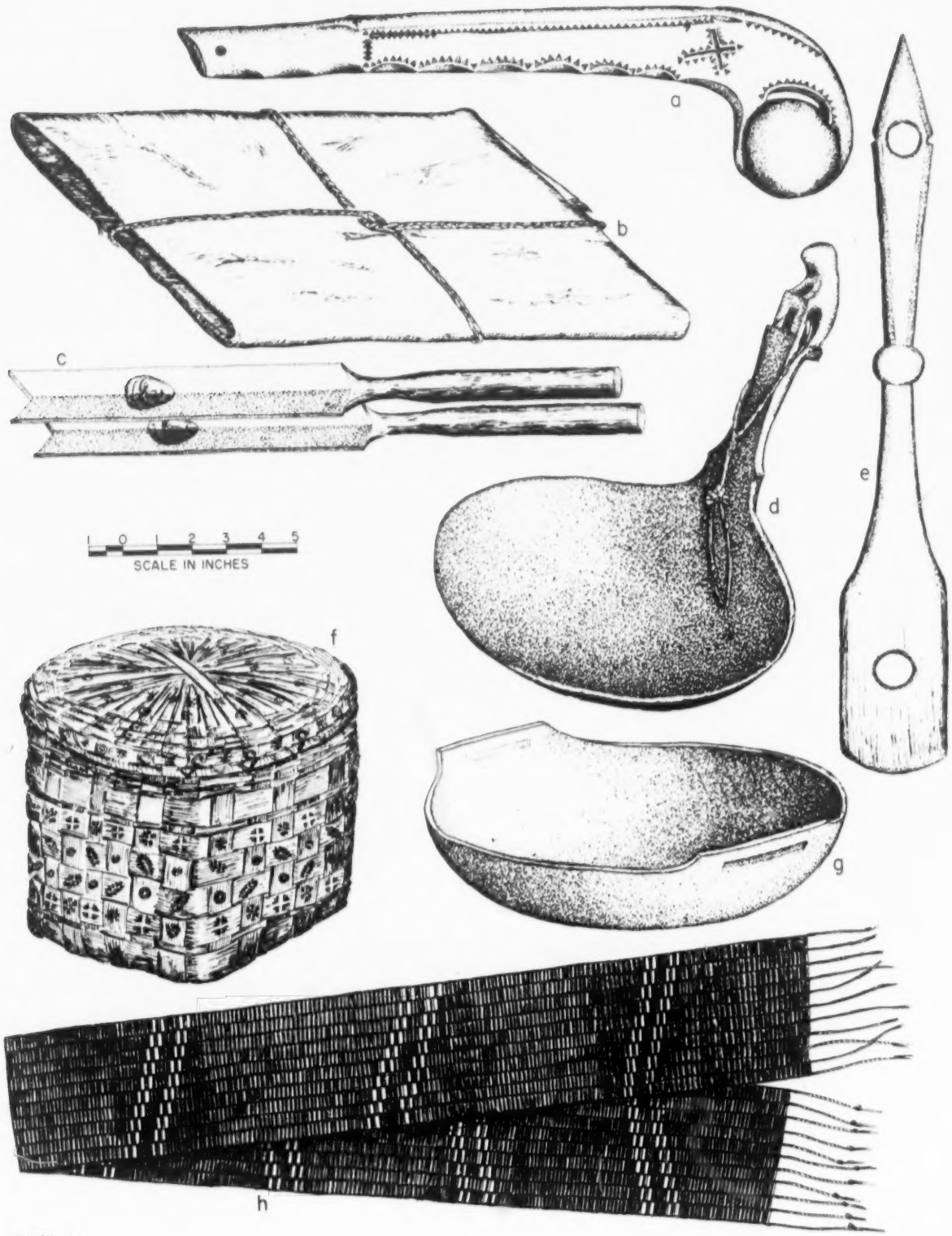

FIG. 5 ARTICLES USED BY THE HISTORIC EASTERN ALGONKIAN TRIBES

Wampum

The term "wampum" is a contraction of the New England Algonkian word "wampumpeak" signifying "strings of white shell beads." While white wampum, made from the quahog or hard-shelled clam and whelk, was the ordinary variety, a purple form, fashioned from the dark spot in the hard-shelled clam, was twice as valuable.

The predecessor of wampum was probably one of the smaller tubular bead forms in extensive use prehistorically along most of the Atlantic coast. It is not improbable that these shell beads, along with other ornamental forms in marine shells, constituted items of exchange with inland tribes, in whose graves, dating back to late Archaic times, they have been discovered by archeological research. In their need for a convenient form of small currency, the Dutch settlers at Manhattan may have selected a trait to which trade value already attached. They seem quickly to have standardized the selected item for size and value. By 1630, the use of wampum as money by coastal Indians, Dutch and English was quite general. It had even spread inland to the Iroquois, probably in connection with growing emphasis on the fur trade.

Wampum was manufactured with European tools both by Indians and white men, and it was employed in many ways. As a convenient medium of exchange, it circulated in strings or as loose beads. It served extensively in personal ornamentation on clothing, headbands, necklaces etc. Its ceremonial usage, most fully developed by the Iroquois, involved special strings and belts for treaty making, messages, mourning, record keeping and other purposes (see fig. 5,h).

Ceremonialism

Even less is known about the religious and ceremonial ideology and customs of these Algonkian tribes than of other and less occult aspects of their way of life. It is reported that they had deities called "manitos," some of whom were regarded as beneficial, others as malevolent. These seem to have been "nature spirits" identified with various phenomena, as celestial bodies, particularly the sun, fire, winds, lightning and thunder, etc. Evidence has also been cited in support of the concept, among certain tribes, of a Supreme Being or "a good god, superior to others," but it is not clear whether this idea was prehistorically held.

Thanksgiving ceremonies, observed at various seasons of the year, included green corn and harvest festivals, and perhaps offerings of first fruits of hunt and harvest.

Much use was made of charms or amulets in the control of supernatural power. Omens were eagerly sought before undertaking any important mission. A kind of star calendar was observed in which women, as the planters, were especially versed.

Contact with the supernatural was generally effected through the instrumentality of the shaman, who was usually also the doctor. His healing practices of blowing upon the ailing area or sucking through a bone tube applied to the patient, depended upon the general belief that sickness was due to the intrusion of a foreign body or invasion by an evil spirit. Both situations were thought to have been induced by witchcraft, and required exorcism through magical techniques.

Other modes of treatment utilized herbal medicines and the sweat bath. The latter popular treatment was undergone in a small hut within which the nude patient squatted near a heap of heated stones upon which he slowly poured water until, near exhaustion from sweating, he plunged forth into a nearby body of cold water to check the sweating process.

Among the Delaware, at least during the later period of their history, picture writing reached an advanced stage of development. The pictographic figures were scratched or painted on bark or wooden slabs, the most famous example being the "Walam Olum" or migration legend of this people. The ceremonial use of wooden masks and rawhide drums (figs. 5,b,c; 6,a) is likewise historically attested for the Delaware.

Burial Customs

As seems to have been quite generally the case among Indians, according to both historical and archeological evidences, these Algonkians are reported to have been faithful to each other in sickness, and when death came, to have been demonstrative in their grief.

Our earliest account (Verrazano's, 1524) states, "We judge them [the Indians on Narragansett Bay] to be very affectionate and charitable towards their relatives, making loud lamentations in their adversity and in their misery calling to mind all their good fortune. At their departure out of life their relations mutually join in weeping, mingled with singing for a long while."

It appears to have been the custom in the eastern Algonkian region to blacken the face in mourning; women might also cut off their hair and burn it on the grave of sons or husbands.

Until recent times in this area the corpse was interred in a flexed or folded position on its side, in a pit dug a few feet into the ground. The Moravian missionary, David Zeisberger, tells us that among the Delaware of about 1760 the grave was generally dug by old women, who lined it with bark. The body was dressed in its best clothes soon after death and laid on a mat or skin in the middle of the hut, surrounded by the personal effects of the deceased. After sunset, and also before daybreak, female relations and friends assembled around the body to mourn over it.

Archeological excavation of probable eastern Algonkian graves prior to the historic period seldom reveals offerings of articles to the dead.

FIG. 6 ARTICLES USED BY THE HISTORIC EASTERN ALGONKIAN TRIBES

The Mahicans are said to have believed that the soul goes up westward on leaving the body and is met with rejoicing by those who have gone before. In the other world, black otter skins are worn, in token of gladness. However, Wassenaer adds, "They have no desire to be with them."

The Post-Colonial Period

It is impossible satisfactorily to estimate the size of the Indian population of the eastern New York-southern New England area at any period in prehistoric or early historic times. Population density appears to have been greatest during the 16th and beginning 17th century, when large Indian towns are mentioned from various points along the New England coast. Extensive occupation, in settlements ranging from hamlets to villages of several hundred people, seems also to have occurred on Block Island, Long Island, Staten Island, Manhattan Island, and along both shores of the Hudson at intervals as far at least as Cohoes. From historic accounts it seems quite certain that over some of this area Indian population was large enough effectively to prevent seizure of the land by force, even with the superior weapons of Europeans.

The latter, however, brought a more subtle, unsuspected (even to themselves) and deadlier weapon in the form of infectious diseases, previously unknown in the New World, against which the native tribes had acquired no immunity. Certain virus diseases, as measles and smallpox, quickly reached epidemic proportions, destroying in some cases whole communities of people. Thus, between 1616 and 1620, the tribes of southern New England were scourged by a frightful plaguelike epidemic which so greatly reduced their numbers as to break their resistance to white settlement in their lands. Between 1632 and 1633 they were again ravaged by what seems to have been smallpox and very few survived.

Conflicts with the invading whites, in particular, the Pequot war of 1637 and King Philip's War of 1675 and 1676, took further heavy toll. These twin disasters, sickness and war, mark the history of the whole area, with similar consequences everywhere.

Fig. 6. Articles Used by the Historic Eastern Algonkian Tribes

a. Delaware wooden mask employed in curing dance
b. Beaded velvet shoulder pouch of the Munsee (Delaware)
c. Ribbon decorated broadcloth pouch of the Mahican
d. Beaded broadcloth leggings worn by Mahican woman
e. Woman's beaded broadcloth moccasins from the Mahican Indians
f. Delaware wooden cradle board
(a, f, by courtesy of the American Museum of Natural History. Other specimens in N. Y. State Museum.)

As pressures increased, surviving remnants of the devastated bands moved farther inland and finally, about mid-18th century, out of the area entirely. Only a thin scattering of Indian people remained in the ancient homeland.

At present, some 183 descendants of the Shinnecock band of the Montauk Confederacy inhabit a reservation reduced to about 400 acres near Southampton, Long Island. Their ethnic identity is almost obliterated through Negro intermarriage and their acculturation is virtually complete.

Of the various tribes of the Delaware, some representatives remain among other broken Indian groups on reservations in Oklahoma, Ontario and elsewhere. With some of the Munsee in Shawano County, Wisconsin, reside a few descendants of their old neighbors, the Mahican, under the name of Stockbridge Indians. (See figures 5 and 6 for illustrations of eastern Algonkian articles of the historic period.

Suggested References

Denver Art Museum Leaflets, Denver, Colo.
Nos. 27 and 28 - The New England Tribes
No. 31 - Iroquoian and Algonkian Wampum
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